

Latin Grammy Winners Unable to Obtain Timely Visas

A dozen Cuban acts nominated were unable to obtain visas in time to attend the 2003 Latin Grammy Awards. Two of the twelve acts had won in their categories. A spokesperson for the U.S. Department of State (DOS) was questioned in the days leading to the September 3rd awards ceremony regarding whether the Cuban musicians would receive their visas in time for the awards ceremony. The DOS spokesman replied that the Cuban performers would likely not receive their visas in time to attend the ceremony because they had applied for the visas too late to complete the necessary security checks. Various news accounts lay the blame for the performers' absence with the Cuban government for holding up the paperwork; the Latin Recording Academy for caving to pressure from anti-Cuba groups by issuing the invitations too late; the DOS for taking too long; and the performers, themselves, for waiting too long to apply for their visas. This ceremony was televised on CBS from Miami, Florida in prime time.

As security checks and mandatory interviews for visas has slowed processing times, those seeking visas may be tempted to think that their wealth, fame, or critical acclaim will enable them to receive their visas quickly and easily. The example of these Cuban musicians, however, shows that the consulates do place security above all other concerns. Neither one's celebrity nor giving officials short notice will help a person to obtain a visa to enter the U.S. Efforts were made to accommodate these groups, however, there are no exceptions to the security checks, which are particularly stringent for citizens or nationals of certain countries. Cuba is one of the seven countries designated by the U.S. government as a state sponsor of terrorism, and there are stringent security checks required for citizens or nationals of all of those countries.

DOS stressed the need to apply well in advance of the travel date, to avoid such problems in the future. We take this opportunity to remind our NCLS, Inc. clients readers that visa applications should be submitted as early as possible to avoid delays that could result in their missing important events. Otherwise, the conference, wedding, or awards ceremony one is planning to attend might have long since ended before the visa is finally granted, if it is granted at all.